



## **Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors**

"Rapid City Circle of Friends"

A Bush Foundation Community Innovation Grant

### **BEAM**

BRIDGING CULTURES  
EDUCATING OURSELVES AND OTHERS  
ADVOCATING  
MODELING RESPECTFUL BEHAVIORS

### **"Rapid City Circle of Friends" Community Initiatives and Process of Engagement**

Presentation to the South Dakota State-Tribal Relations Committee

Thursday, December 15, 2017 Ramkota Hotel Rapid City, SD 57701

**Presenters:** Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors, A Bush Community Innovation Grant - Kibbe Conti, Marnie Herrmann, Bruce Long Fox, Karen Mortimer (Director), Whitney Rencountre

#### **WHAT is this project about?**

The Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors (MOA) project has come together, evolved and the group has become a leader in in our community. MOA is now a group of Native and non-Native community leaders and stakeholders working together to *BEAM (Bridge cultures, Educate ourselves and others, Advocate and Model behavior we want to see in others)*. MOAs believe 'History and Place Matter...Relationships Matter'. MOA is working toward systemic change through leadership and engagement.

#### **WHY did we get involved?**

A brief history: The original Bush Foundation grant addressed the community problem related to the tradition of broken or lack of relationships as well as lack of respect between the Native and Non-Native American communities. The CIG grant was awarded to the Rapid City Public School Foundation (RCPSF) as the fiscal sponsor. The RCPSF partnered with the Rapid City Schools (RCAS) in the beginning of the work. The goal was to create cultural ambassadors through learning groups and connect this learning from the schools to the community with a spirit of respect. Desired outcomes were to create a culture where citizens are educated about Lakota history and culture, and to promote Non- Natives joining with the Native community in greater numbers in participation in community activities around culture. It was the intent for the Rapid City community and the RCAS to join hand in hand to understand and celebrate the curriculum projects related to the "Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards". The original concept paired the RCAS and the community to support the teaching and learning of the standards and cultural sensitivity.

#### **WHO are we?**

The Ambassadors (a group of Native and non- Native community leaders and stakeholders) were selected, started their journey together on the "Lakota Lands and Identities" Classroom on

Wheels and started to work together. Following this 5 day experience the group came together for many convenings to build relationships and develop a plan to address the stated problem.

### **WHAT are we doing?**

Our current projects include the development and presentation of educational forums for the community, development of tours to the reservations as a potential model, the development and execution of a media campaign (with roll out in January), as well as continuing connections and support as 'champions' of community efforts intended to celebrate and support Native culture.

A few of the results were renaming the group (from Oceti Sakowin to Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi), a development of a mission (BEAM), the definition of three major projects and countless connections being formed to weave our community together. The scope of the grant moved beyond the RCPSF and the RCAS partnership to a movement rippling into the greater Rapid City community. Significant connections, partnerships and impact have occurred from the start up of this initiative. *(Please see MOA BEAM- Shining Our Light Summary.)*

We are also a part of 'Rapid City Collective Impact' and we have an opportunity to maximize the momentum we are experiencing in our work. The RCCI diversity and cultural development work stream is just now getting underway.

### **HOW will we continue?**

We are seeking additional funding to create a bridge to continue this valuable work. The Bush Foundation grant ends in September and the remaining funds in the CIG are budgeted to support event commitments, MOA capacity building, funding final operating expenses, supporting the initiatives we are championing and to fund three new MOA initiatives: 1) developing and rolling out a media campaign 2) planning and executing a series of educational forums 3) completing a pilot project of educational tours. MOA has an office base at the Garage and we have rent paid through February. In addition, our plan is to move our fiscal sponsorship from the Rapid City Public School Foundation to the Black Hills Area Community Foundation as we seek additional support for this valuable work. We have been awarded a grant from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation to bridge, continue and grow our work.

We are also looking for support to develop a strategic plan for a new initiative to create a cohort of youth Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors. Our current thinking reflects a focus on late middle school -high school age students in the Rapid City area and we hope to develop relationship building field trips to the reservation, to engage in fun group lessons to learn some Lakota Language, to participate in team building around a yet to be developed service project for the community, etc. We also hope to connect the current MOA leaders to this youth cohort. Potential leaders have been identified.

In summary, we believe MOA is positioned to continue to grow and act as catalyst for change in our community. "Change happens at the speed of trust". We are seeing trust being built, slowly but surely. And...we still believe this is the right thing to do!

### **Questions?**

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Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors  
BEAM- "Shining Our Light"

...or what happened in the past year and how we can continue to "BEAM"

**Bridging Cultures**  
**Educating ourselves and others**  
**Advocating**  
**Modeling respectful behaviors**

It has been a productive and rewarding time working with this cohort, as well as more than a year plus developing this grant. We have had the opportunity to learn so much along with our MOA cohort and with many from our community. We want to shine a light on the multiple events, the impacts, the champions and some of the results of our thinking and learning together.

We can make a difference!

**Here's what happened**  
**September 2014-December 2016**

- **Participants were vetted and selected** for the OSA cohort to begin by attending the June 2015 bus
- **RCAS Teachers were supported by a stipend** to complete a five day seminar provided by CAIRNS in the spring (results not provided yet by OIE)
- **Hosted a Public Learning Event:** CAIRNS presented a lecture on Lewis and Clark and the Lakota for the RC community (March 2015)
- **A Logo** was designed by OSA member Whitney Rencountre
- **Social event** for the Oceti Sakowin Ambassadors (OSA) @ Prairie Edge (June 4, 2015)
- **"Bus trip" / Lakota Lands and identities** - 44 participants (June 8-12, 2015)
- **OSA Convenings:** This is a time for the cohort to come together and look ahead as relationships are supported. "History and Place matter"  
"Relationships Matter" (June 26, September 23, December 1, 2015, March 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016)
- **Social event:** OSA social event -@ OSA member Dale Lamphere's home (July 31, 2015)
- **Film funding** was provided for two potential films...The Lakota Emergence Story film is completed and is in circulation
- **Education Fund generated:** An educational fund has initial funding and planning is in the works for "Next Generation Leaders"
- **OSA as a Champion/ Partner for the Black Hills Wacipi:**  
Substantial OSA support and engagement around the **BH Wacipi**



- **OSA sponsored “Wacipi 101”:** A special program was presented to community members to learn about a “Pow Wow”, it’s traditions and culture in the effort to assist people to feel comfortable and welcome to attend the Wacipi (about 150 people attended)
- **OSA as a Champion for the Native American Parade:** Partnering with Rural American Initiatives to create and support a **Native American Day Parade...** with substantial engagement by OSA and others to create a successful event...OSA funded the parade prizes and provided many volunteers (over 60 entries participated)
- **OSA as a Champion for the Lakota Nations Invitational Basketball Tournament :** Partnering with LNI board to welcome LNI to Rapid City. Initial efforts began in October 2015. Current (2016) significant efforts in motion for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LNI. MOA part of the team to create a significant partnership with the LNI Board.
- **OSA – Community Social/** event to support the LNI was held @ Prairie Edge (November 12, 2015)
- **OSA Partner- RC Community conversations ...**OSA has supported the conversations and their work. Most recent CC was February 25 2016!
- **Law Enforcement Impact:**  
Chief of Police (Karl Jegeris, OSA member) hired a first time cultural leader (Vaughn Vargas, another OSA member the chief met in the OSA cohort) for the police force to address unmet needs relating to connecting with the Native American community. This will be a permanent position on the police force. A task force is being created. MOA supporting public relations regarding racial relations and policing through several significant sponsorships.
- **Health system impact:** OSA member, Brent Phillips, CEO of Regional Health, put together a Lakota Land and Identities bus trip for 50 of the Regional Health employees and developed a cultural committee within the health system. On- going efforts are evident.
- **Business impact:** RC Chamber of Commerce (through OSAs Marnie Herrmann and Bill May, past and current president of the Chamber) becoming active in supporting the welcoming of the Native community to participate in the Wacipi and the LNI and in developing other engagement . Signs were created. A cultural committee has been formed.
- **Youth Impact:** The Club for Boys Firepit- OSA member and Club for Boys Board member, Sam Mortimer initiated this effort. Also, teachers in the RCAS have been trained and some are creating lessons and curriculum related to Lakota History and culture. The JAG program is an active program to support middle school youth.
- **MOA capacity building** supported by periodic convenings and retreats to build teams, support relationships and develop a strategic plan (June 2015, September 2015, December 2015, March 2016, )
- **Ad Hoc committee** formed to develop a directional path for the OSA
- **Group renamed! - Miniuzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors (MOA)**

- **Adopted BEAM** as a guiding principles: **B**ridging Cultures , **E**ducating ourselves and others, **A**dvocating , **M**odeling respectful behaviors
- **Finance committee formed**
- **Communication** – Protocol established and two spokespersons named (Marnie Herrmann and Whitney Rencountre)
- **Year long lease signed at The Garage** and an “MOA home” as well as place to hold meetings and convenings (February 2016- February 2017)
- **Developing an Educational Tours model** to connect the community of RC to adjacent Lakota reservation life ( tours completed August 6: Educational/experiential trip to the Oglala Nations Fair; August 26: Educational/experiential trip to meet with a spiritual leader in Wanblee )
- **Developing and sponsoring educational forums** for our community (examples below) :
  - Series of 8 cultural, historical and spiritual educational seminars are planned to begin August 16 (Upon invitation and open to the public)
  - Educational Forums for the community about the ‘History of the former Boarding School Lands in West Rapid City’ , a partnership has been forged with the Mayor to bring community stakeholders together (process beginning in September)
  - Wacipi 101 – second annual event to share information about the “hows , whats and whys” of a Wacipi ( Pow Wow) on September or early October
- **Development and execution of a substantial community media campaign** to bridge, educate, advocate and model respectful behaviors (roll out in January)
- **Continuing to champion** and support the following through resources and ‘people power’ (examples below) :
  - BH Wacipi
  - Native American Day Parade
  - LNI – 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration (Downtown signs!)
  - RCCI
  - First peoples Fund CSA Awards
  - Partnership with the RCPD
  - Partnership with the RC Chamber of Commerce
  - Collaboration with the RCCommunity Conversations – Educational Advocacy for the Oceti Sakowin Understandings Curriculum
- **Exploration of the potential Development of a Youth MOA**
- **MOA as a member of the Rapid City Collective Impact** – Diversity and Cultural Development work stream